

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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President Obama's Statement on Violence in Syria

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
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Statement by the President on the Violence in Syria

I am appalled by the Syrian government's use of violence and brutality against its own people. The reports out of Hama are horrifying and demonstrate the true character of the Syrian regime. Once again, President Assad has shown that he is completely incapable and unwilling to respond to the legitimate grievances of the Syrian people. His use of torture, corruption and terror puts him on the wrong side of history and his people. Through his own actions, Bashar al-Assad is ensuring that he and his regime will be left in the past, and that the courageous Syrian people who have demonstrated in the streets will determine its future. Syria will be a better place when a democratic transition goes forward. In the days ahead, the United States will continue to increase our pressure on the Syrian regime, and work with others around the world to isolate the Assad government and stand with the Syrian people.

President Obama Praises Four African Leaders as Democratic Models

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama told the leaders of Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger and Benin that the United States will be a "stalwart partner" as the four French-speaking African countries continue their democratization and development.

Obama met with President Boni Yayi of Benin, President Alpha Condé of Guinea, Niger's Mahamadou Issoufou and Alassane Ouattara of Côte d'Ivoire at the White House July 29 and praised all four as leaders who "can serve as effective models" for Africa's democratic progress, which he said is vital to a stable, prosperous and just Africa.

"All these leaders were elected through free and fair elections. They've shown extraordinary persistence in wanting to promote democracy in their countries despite significant risks to their own personal safety and despite enormous challenges," Obama said.

The president said the United States is working with the leaders to help them build strong state institutions, including "effective judiciaries, strong civil societies [and] legislatures that are effective and inclusive," while "making sure that human rights are protected."

The four presidents are "absolutely committed" to ensuring that their countries will see strong democratic practices, economic prosperity and security, Obama said, and he told them, "The United States will stand with you every step of the way."

Bruce Wharton, the State Department's deputy assistant secretary for public diplomacy in the Bureau of African Affairs, said that by inviting the four presidents to Washington, the Obama administration is highlighting the importance of "holding credible elections, building strong democratic institutions and fostering economic development."

"These leaders have recently been elected or re-elected via the democratic process, in some cases successfully overcoming lengthy periods of conflict or disputed rule," he said.

Earlier in the day, the four presidents spoke at an event in Washington hosted by the Corporate Council on Africa (CCA), a trade association that is working to strengthen and facilitate commercial relations between the United States and Africa. That event was preceded by a July 28 panel discussion on democratic progress in Francophone Africa by the four presidents at the United States Institute of Peace.

Speaking at CCA, each leader strongly encouraged more American private investment into their countries to help build infrastructure and spur development, while also acknowledging that an open democratic system run by strong governing institutions is critical to attracting investors.

President Issoufou of Niger said that for there to be more partnership between U.S. and African business entities "we need to offer you more security, more judicial security, and ... establish very strong institutions to protect you."

Echoing President Obama's 2009 speech in Ghana, he said "Africa does not need strongmen, it needs strong institutions [and] strong states." This does not mean militarized states, he said, but rather states that fight corruption, function under the rule of law and are able to provide security for investments.

Issoufou said Niger is establishing a judicial framework to help accomplish this. Under his proposal, foreign investors would be able to help Niger's infrastructure by investing in public entities, such as railroads, and managing that investment until they have earned back more than their initial payments. After that, the entity would be transferred back to the state of Niger, he said.

President Ouattara said Côte d'Ivoire and West Africa

have the resources and the people to succeed, but must also create a positive environment for business.

Côte d'Ivoire has had problems with its judicial and security sectors, but Ouattara said they are now being reformed and will offer investors more fair and attractive business opportunities.

Investment and development are important not only for Côte d'Ivoire, but for the whole region, he said, because neighboring countries stand to benefit from another country's prosperity.

Ouattara also praised President Obama for acknowledging that the support of dictatorships does not achieve stability, growth or prosperity. "It's democracy that can lead to prosperity," he said.

President Conde of Guinea said his country is working to overcome its troubled past and has critical infrastructure and development needs where "everything is yet to be done," but added that Guinea's needs and its new governance also offer much economic potential.

"We've known very poor governance. We've known military regimes. And this is the first time that we've had free, open, democratic elections. But coming out of a military regime is quite difficult," he said. "We're still a very fragile country."

He highlighted the need to improve the distribution of electricity across the country, and also urged closer cooperation among Guinea's neighbors. "Rather than have each country reinvent the wheel, we can have a more efficient sharing of assets and organization," he said.

President Yayi of Benin said Africa is the "continent of the future" because of its untapped potential. He said he is committed to reform as his country's head of state.

"This office is the most important because it means that I have nothing left to lose. So I have committed myself to accomplish great reforms for the people of Benin," he said.

His government is working to ensure peace "because without peace one cannot have development." Better governance, he added, will also help to ensure security.

U.S. Economy Slowly Recovers from Worst Recession on Record

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer

Washington — The U.S. economy has grown for the eighth straight quarter, showing an increase in the gross domestic product at a 1.3 percent annualized rate from

April to June, according to the Commerce Department.

The growth came in below private-sector expectations of 1.8 percent, according to the latest GDP report from the Commerce Department's Bureau of Economic Analysis. The statistics, released July 29, revised growth for January to March from 1.9 percent down to 0.4 percent, indicating a near stagnation of the U.S. economy.

Another notable revision was to 2009 figures. GDP for that year was revised down 0.9 percentage points, which Commerce Secretary Gary Locke said in a July 29 statement indicated that "the recession was even more severe than initially estimated." The recession is already recognized as the deepest since official quarterly estimates began in 1947, according to the White House.

The GDP measures a country's total output of goods and services and serves as a primary indicator of economic health.

Locke said the economy "isn't growing as fast as it needs to" and called on U.S. leaders to build on progress made toward financial recovery since 2009 by enacting legislation to reduce the country's debt while strengthening job-creating capacities and enhancing global competitiveness for the future.

Austan Goolsbee, chair of President Obama's Council of Economic Advisers, said the United States is "at a fragile moment in the world economy and cannot afford to do anything to undermine our recovery." He said the unemployment rate remains "unacceptably high" and that faster growth is needed to replace jobs lost in the economic downturn.

Goolsbee said the report "underscores the need for bipartisan action to help the private sector and the economy grow," through measures to create jobs, extend unemployment insurance and continue the payroll tax cut. He also called on Washington to pass pending free trade agreements, to create an infrastructure bank to help create American jobs and to take a "balanced" approach to deficit reduction.

Goolsbee said increases in net exports, fixed investment and federal government spending contributed to the second quarter growth. But the gains were partly offset by a decline in spending by state and local governments, a sharp drop in motor vehicle purchases and an increase in imports, he said.

The Commerce Department will release its revised second quarter growth estimates August 26.

State Department on Conclusion of Meetings with North Korea

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesperson
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MEDIA NOTE

Conclusion of Meetings with The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)

Following the first round of denuclearization talks between the nuclear negotiators of the Republic of Korea and the DPRK, the United States invited North Korean First Vice Foreign Minister Kim Kye-Gwan to New York. The U.S. interagency delegation, led by Special Representative for North Korea Policy Stephen Bosworth, and the DPRK delegation concluded their two-day discussions today.

As the United States said from the beginning, these discussions were to explore the willingness of North Korea to take concrete and irreversible steps toward denuclearization. In that regard, these were constructive and business-like discussions. The United States reiterated that the path is open to North Korea towards the resumption of talks, improved relations with the United States, and greater regional stability if North Korea demonstrates through actions that it supports the resumption of the Six-Party process as a committed and constructive partner.

Before deciding on next steps to resume the process, the United States will consult closely with the Republic of Korea and other partners in the Six-Party Talks.

Thomas Jefferson's Iftar

"Ramadan," said President Obama at a White House iftar dinner in 2010, "is a reminder that Islam has always been a part of America. The first Muslim ambassador to the United States, from Tunisia, was hosted by President Jefferson, who arranged a sunset dinner for his guest because it was Ramadan — making it the first known iftar at the White House, more than 200 years ago."

The dinner to which the president referred took place on December 9, 1805, and Jefferson's guest was Sidi Soliman Mellimelli, an envoy from the bey (chieftain) of Tunis who spent six months in Washington. The context of Mellimelli's visit to the United States was a tense dispute over piracy on American merchant vessels by the Barbary states and the capture of Tunisian vessels trying to run an American blockade of Tripoli.

Mellimelli arrived during Ramadan, and Jefferson, when

he invited the envoy to the president's house, changed the meal time from the usual hour of 3:30 p.m. to "precisely at sunset" in deference to the man's religious obligation.

Jefferson's knowledge of Islam likely came from his legal studies of natural law. In 1765, Jefferson purchased a two-volume English translation of the Quran for his personal library, a collection that became, in 1815, the basis of the modern Library of Congress.

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